

June 7, 2009 - What Showcase Really Is

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We wish outsiders could see Showcase for Commerce through the eyes of local businesses and the Greater Johnstown community, and through the eyes of the military organizations and large contractors that make connections here.

As our region celebrates the growth of the local defense sector, and appreciates the infusion of jobs and economic impact that such growth has brought, some see Showcase only as symbolic of U.S. Rep. John Murtha's influence on defense spending in Washington.

While considering the uncertain circumstances facing Kuchera Defense Systems Inc., we wish others also could see the proliferation of local companies of all sizes that are doing great work that fuels the local economy and serves the country.

While folks are discussing the number of passengers flying in and out of the Johns-town airport, we wish conversation also included the thousands who live and work within a few miles of the airport and do so in part because it is there.

But ultimately, Showcase is not about what people outside our region think of what is happening here. Rather, this event is about our region becoming a

player on the national scene while enhancing our own manufacturing and technological capabilities to be part of the shifting global economy.

That really is an incredible story.

We have long advocated for responsible spending by our representatives in government. But we are not so naive as to think that a region once buckling from the impact of a major natural disaster and reeling from the loss of its primary industry base could even dream of rebuilding and flourishing without some help.

Murtha is seen as the "King of Pork" by some, but we would bet there are about 434 other congressional districts that wish they had someone working on their behalf in Washington with the dedication, energy, contacts and influence that the Johnstown Democrat demonstrates.

The congressman has been the facilitator, opening doors and making introductions.

But local companies still must navigate the contracting and bidding processes. They still must deliver on work as promised. And our region overall has a great reputation for doing just that.

For organizations such as the Greater Johnstown/Cambria County Chamber of Commerce and Johnstown Area Regional Industries, Showcase is the moment of truth. Can business development organizations help connect local companies with opportunities at the national and global levels?

And can local contractors dine at the same table as international powers such as Boeing, Raytheon and Lockheed Martin?

The answer to both is a resounding "yes."

Likewise, Showcase serves as an important reminder that several major national — indeed even international — corporations have played and continue to play key roles in the local economy.

We are grateful for the presence of DRS's Laurel Technologies, Northrop Grumman, Lockheed and others in our region. They employ local people, support the local marketplace and bolster the local tax base.

Showcase shines the spotlight on companies based in our region and on the local

facilities of larger companies based elsewhere.

The networking opportunities are enormous, obviously, as Concurrent Technologies Corp. and JWFâ€™Defense take the floor with the likes of General Dynamics and Rollsâ€™Royce.

But the local companies have built success upon the relationships developed at Showcase. And they can share in the business of protecting and defending our country because they do good work when given the chance.

As much as Showcase enables local companies to swim in those deep waters, Showcase tells the world that our companies bring a high level of skill and dependability to those situations.

In most cases, local companies have proven that they can handle tasks as well as or better than companies elsewhere, and help the military and the major contractors control costs at the same time.

Of Showcase, Murtha spokesman Matt Mazonkey said: “The event is really about showcasing the talent and skills of our area, and demonstrating that significant cost savings can be achieved and quality products produced when the big companies pair up with the smaller companies on federal contracts.”

Congratulations to all involved for another great Showcase for Commerce.